

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL ROBERT ABRAMS, CHIEF OF
TRAINING, THE COMBINED ARMS CENTER SUBJECT: COMBATING TRAINING PROGRAMS
MODERATOR: JACK HOLT TIME: 11:00 A.M. EST DATE: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2007

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MR. HOLT: Colonel Abrams, can you hear me?

COL. ABRAMS: Yes, sir. Loud and clear.

I'm Jack Holt with the OSD and the Blogger's Roundtable. And somebody
else just joined us. Who was that?

Q John Donovan (sp).

MR. HOLT: Okay, John. Thank you much.

Welcome, sir, to the Blogger's Roundtable this morning. Glad you could
be with us and do you have an opening statement for us, sir?

COL. ABRAMS: Yep, I do. And thanks for -- how many people do we have
on this morning? Do we have everybody? MR. HOLT: Well, we've got Christian
Lowe with military.com; Jason Sigger, the Armchair Generalist; Andrew Lubin with
OnPoint; and John Donovan, John of Arc (sp).

COL. ABRAMS: Okay, great.

Look, I appreciate everybody coming online today and I look forward to
answering your questions.

First a little bit about me: I'm the deputy commander here at the
Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and I've been on the job a
little bit over two months. Some of you may have done or may not have done some
research on what that exactly means, but to be honest with you, I didn't really
know what it meant until I got here -- other than I knew the position existed.
In essence, I'm the primary responsible agent for supervising policies and
procedures for collective training on behalf of the TRADOC commander and the
commander here at the Combined Arms Center. So all things involving training,
involving more than one person, somehow it gets back to something under my
direct control.

There's three things I really kind of just want to mention briefly and
then I will talk about whatever you want to talk about. And there are three
things that most of you are probably familiar with. The first one is our combat
training center program, specifically our Combat Training Center Program. And
my point to you is that I'm two years removed from brigade command, but for
the majority of my career I've been operational. And so I've had an opportunity

to go back out to the National Training Center and visit with both -- and the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. And I can tell you that the transformation that has gone on since 9/11 -- but really since 2003 -- is fairly significant and I'm prepared to talk about whatever detail you want. But it's not your father's national training center or JMRC. It is a full-spectrum, capable training center that is as close a replication of today's fight that we're in and is certainly postured for future fights and I'll talk about that as much as you want.

The second one is our constructive battle -- CTC -- and that's the battle command training program who works directly for me. And as you know, that is the agency that for a little over 20 years now has had the mantle of training our divisions, corps, Army service component commands and battle command. And we do it using a constructive simulation as the driver, CBS or BBS or you name your constructive simulation. But they too have dramatically transformed and are prepared in the near future to support more of our modular brigades and brigade combat teams out in the force. And I'm ready to take your questions on that as well.

The simulation -- the first thing that struck me is the simulation. I did participate in a division MRE four years ago before we went to OIF-2 and it was basically the Cold War version of the corps battle simulation system -- not much had changed. And everything that we did with regards to the counterinsurgency fight and the full-spectrum fight that we were going to face in Baghdad was really replicated using handwritten measles (sp), as we call them, to help drive certain actions and orders within the division and decisions for the division commander. All of that has now since then been replaced with a joint, non-kinetic effects module that actually feeds in joint non-kinetic effects right into the simulation. And so the challenge now is much, much higher in terms of the constructive simulations supporting our divisions and corps fights.

And then the third one is -- I'll talk about is the National Simulation Center. The National Simulation Center is here at Fort Leavenworth and it is the architectural backbone for all constructive simulations in the Army. And in the future, our goal is -- as we're working on a system to effectively link live, virtual and constructive simulations all in one network so that you could -- and we can kind of do it in small circumstances today, but our goal is worldwide anywhere to be about to build a training environment that can actually link seamlessly for the training force, units that are training live, units that are training virtual and simulators, and units that are training in a constructive environment. So pretty exciting times as we look to the future in terms of maximizing our training capability.

So with that I'll take your questions.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Christian Lowe, you were first online, so why don't you get us started.

Q Hey, Colonel Abrams. It's Christian Lowe from military.com.

Question here: There's been a lot of criticism of the emphasis of training Army and other ground force units on counterinsurgency, urban fights, urban battlefield, that sort of thing, and the lack of emphasis on combined arms training and what you sort of alluded to as the future fight. What's your perspective on that as the man in charge of, you know, training folks -- groups

of people? Is there enough -- are there enough resources being devoted to combined arms training and enough time for soldiers and Marines and other people to go through those training routines?

COL. ABRAMS: Yeah. That's really two types -- that's two different questions. And I'll talk about the time second, because you know, as a trainer myself, you never have enough time and it's all about prioritization, but I'll talk about that second.

First up, a little bit about the combined arms fight: Look, our combined arms training strategy for our formations has not changed. There are challenges, clearly, for home station combined arms training because of the time that you talked about. But that is still a critical underpinning of our collective training strategy and of our capability. To be good at full-spectrum operations -- offense, defense and stability operations -- of which COIN, counterinsurgency, is just one component of, you have to be good at all three.

And you know, that's -- that's kind of our bumper sticker. We're full-spectrum. And so it is. And you know -- and some of you, I think if I read correctly last night -- some of you have been downrange. A lot of you are ex-military. You know, as a commander your first priority is to protect the force. And we protect the force by giving them the confidence in their own ability to survive and conduct operations on the battlefield. And so that starts at individual, but at the platoon, company -- and even at the task force level -- we still continue to stress combined arms, high intensity -- what we would historically call, what you and I would call high-intensity-type training, platoon live fires -- but the difference now is we've added a twist.

You know, when I was a brigade commander, when I first took brigade command, we were doing very austere typically platoon battle runs: infantry, armor, separate, not a lot of dismounted operations, certainly no consideration for an urban environment or civilians. Now, what we're doing at home station is we're doing that same sort of high intensity, but we've really ratcheted up the conditions a notch, because now we realize we're not doing anything without dismounts -- both armor and infantry formations mixed together or you've got some armor formations mixed together or you've got some armor formations that have armor crewmen dismounted who are now motorized. That's the level that we've gone to and in fact, we're doing more of it at the platoon and company level than we ever have before.

Q But if I may interject: Are you doing enough of the maneuver warfare with those tankers, let's say, in their tanks? Actually engaging other tanks, artillery engaging targets and other things? I mean, we read a lot of things about artillerymen being seconded as, you know, convoy security or MPs -- things like that. I mean, are you still able to concentrate on that big war, you know, training piece?

COL. ABRAMS: The big war -- what we're focused on right now as an army is preparing units to go back to the fight.

And it's well documented, you know, what our tempo is. I mean, it's not a secret what our, you know, our battle rhythm is in terms of 15-month deployment and a year back. And so we are preparing units for their next mission.

Now, having said that, you know, to answer your question if their -- if that unit is going to be -- part of their mission set is going to do -- involve

a lot of indirect fire shooting in their next mission, the answer is yes, they are. And so -- and I'll use an example of a unit that's downrange now and I won't get into the specific name of it but it is in support of Task Force Baghdad. That artillery battalion knew before they would deploy that one of their artillery batteries would be used quite extensively in support of kinetic operations, and so as a consequence that battalion commander was afforded the opportunity to train those skills at a very high level and he did not spend a lot of time doing what we would consider other COIN tasks, convoy procedures, motorized patrol procedures and so forth. And as a consequence they're doing fantastic downrange conducting kinetic operations.

But if you have an artillery battalion, let's say, who is given the mission that they're going to conduct security force mission along a main supply route, I mean we clearly have to focus that unit's training to get them ready to go to the fight. Now, what I think you're asking is well, what about in the long term if we have missions after Iraq and Afghanistan that are going to require those high-end skills, and my response to you is is that at our training base, for instance in artillery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, they still retain and train all of those tasks and we retain that core competency. Will there be some startup costs for that next fight if we were directed or prepared to, you know, get units ready for general warfare there would be a slight startup cost.

But -- for instance, I just sat in -- I got a briefing last week on a Rand study that's been ongoing out at the national training center with regards to skill atrophy -- high-end skill atrophy. And what you're talking about is documented in a couple of specific areas. But at the end though what they'll all tell you is is that because of our core training base here in TRADOC will there be a small startup cost? Yes. But we retain that capability.

Q Okay. Thanks.

COL. ABRAMS: All right. MR. HOLT: Okay. Jason?

Q Sir, I work with the Armchair Generalist blog. I apologize -- this question may not be exactly in your lane, but the joint staff recently within the last year put out a or modified the publication regulations on the instructions for professional military education. They added a sentence or two in there that basically said all the service war colleges need to examine their curricula and make sure that they're doing -- combating WMD training to the leaders. To my knowledge, and admittedly it's been a while since I've been out there, I don't think that either Leavenworth or Carlyle has electives going into combating WMD or the traditional counter proliferation mission. And I was wondering if you're knowledgeable of anything going on at Leavenworth to answer the joint staff instruction or maybe just comment on how the army leaders at Leavenworth are approaching the combating WMD requirements.

COL. ABRAMS: You are exactly right at the beginning when you said not in my lane and it would be something less accurate than a wild guess for me to give you an answer. I don't have an idea. I apologize.

Q That's okay. I just took a shot. I didn't have -- wasn't sure what your background was at first. Let me ask a different question then -- maybe a little more easier. I understand that FM 3-0 is in final draft and coming out soon. I was just wondering if you had a date of when that might be released.

COL. ABRAMS: Well, no, I don't, but that I can answer. The doctrine guys don't work for me but I am a contributor to it and in fact I just left a meeting where that exact topic was discussed. I think by January it should be on the street. But let me just explain just for a second since you asked, you know, why is it sort of taking a little extra time. It's taking a little extra time because well, first we got a new chief of staff of the army and he wanted to make sure that he was absolutely comfortable with where we were taking it because that as you know the, you know, 3.0, "Operations Drives", is the doctrinal underpinning for all other doctrine and it especially affects the doctrinal manual that I'm responsible for which is FM 7.0, "Train the Force".

And so, you know, it's -- it is, you know, it's a cornerstone document for the army and as such General Casey wants to make sure that he's got it right, and what he's -- what he has asked the Combined Arms Center to do and our doctrine division here is to get it vetted so we've got, you know, final post review copies that we have inserted and we have spread throughout the force, and then we've developed focus groups both here with majors -- different groups of majors here that are attending CGSC. We've given it to focus groups at the Army War College. We've sent it out to elements or units in the operational force, and then the chief of staff of the army himself and some other senior leaders have gone and talked to those focus groups to get their feedback in terms of do we have it right. So I use the carpenter kind of analogy -- you know, measure twice cut once. He wants to be deliberate. So I know that there's going to be a briefing to him -- the chief of staff of the army -- here at the end of November and then from that there'll be a final vetting I think where, you know, all the senior leaders -- the four stars of the army -- will, you know, nod north and south one more time and then we ought to be able to see it approved for publication sometime in January. But it -- by the way it's a great -- I don't know if you've seen a copy or a bootleg copy but it is a seminal document because it really talks about where we're going.

Q I did see a draft copy and I agree, it'll be interesting once that thing gets released. Thank you.

COL. ABRAMS: Well, if I could, one thing that's going to come out of that is is the chief of staff of the army's training and leader development strategy is going to come directly from that and you're going to see a purposeful shift in our aim point in terms of the collective training conditions that we're going to put the force under, and it'll get everybody's attention.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. And Andrew Lubin?

Q Colonel, good morning -- Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ONPoint. Sir, is it possible that the training is getting too regimented and too specialized? I'm thinking back to -- (inaudible) -- and 215, the artillery group who's based in Mahmudiyah. And Colonel Kershel (sp) made 215 basically a civil affairs battalion and you had some guys in the field and some guys back shooting and then they switch off. So yeah, to stick on Christian's artillery questions, it shouldn't be that difficult to -- they don't -- they shouldn't need that much cross training and there shouldn't be any real lack of skills. This is something they're practicing pretty much through their entire tour of duty.

COL. ABRAMS: You're suggesting that there shouldn't be any of that skill atrophy?

Q Well, correct, because they're -- if they're not shooting on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays of this week they're shooting next week.

COL. ABRAMS: Yeah, but I think really the point is is that, you know, we don't have a standard template for what every, you know, type unit is doing downrange. I mean, that -- not every artillery battalion as part of their core tasks are shooting artillery. For instance, and I'm just guessing now but my guess is is that inside Task Force Baghdad that we have artillery batteries that because of rules for the escalation of force and what's an appropriate response to indirect fire I'm sure there's batteries that haven't fired any artillery. And so, you know, they may be conducting other sort of counterinsurgency operations, fixed point security, and what not and so you could have units that will lose that, you know, that basic skill sets for delivering predictive and accurate fires.

However, what I will say that we lose in those skills, what we are gaining out of it -- that we can't replicate anywhere, to include our Combat Training Centers no matter how hard we try -- is combat experience. And that, as you know, is -- it's almost hard to put a price tag on.

And so even though they haven't fired a lot of artillery, they've got a tremendous amount of combat experience, which will do them very, very well for all future types of conflicts and operations that we may or may not have to conduct.

And the same could be drawn for tank platoons. For instance, in my own Brigade Combat Team when I was in Iraq, I was only authorized to take about a third of my combat power. I deployed in March of 2004, and at that point we had thought we were going to transition to a -- very much stability operations, and that all kind of changed on the 4th of April of 2004.

But as such, you know, I had motorized tank companies who never saw a tank for the 12 most that we were down-range. And what skills -- tank skills that they might -- that might have atrophied, I can tell you it's far outweighed by the combat experience that those soldiers and leaders gained while conducting full-spectrum operations.

So, you know, that's kind of where I stand on it.

Q If we could follow up, because if you look at what the probable and possible next engagements would be, it's going to be more fourth-generation warfare and more coin, than it will be full-scale, -- (inaudible) -- type of warfare. So a guy who can shoot a 155 or a 105, but has combat skills and on the ground training, is almost worth more to the services than, you know, somebody who's, you know, who's able to shoot a 105 only.

COL. ABRAMS: Well that, that is, you know, there is a lot of -- and I'd say, I'd refer to you to the upcoming QDR and kind of where we see the, you know, the world as we go it.

But our chief of staff of the Army has coined the phrase that "we're in persistent conflict," and I happen to believe that that's true also. And this type of, you know, combat and full-spectrum operations that we're seeing today in Iraq and Afghanistan, it may not be exactly replicated in other places, but it's pretty close. But of course, you know, you have the other side of the, you know, the wall that will say, well, what about the North Koreans, or some other large army that has a lot of conventional capability? And I don't want to make

conjecture, but the likelihood of persistent conflict with those countries, I think, is generally accepted as much less likely than the type of persistent conflict that is seen today in Iraq and Afghanistan. And we're preparing our force to deal with those challenges vis the former.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And John.

Q Morning, sir. Just so you know where I come from, because it's not clear in my bio. I'm a three-year former OC at the National Training Center, but it was my grandfather's training center. I'm a veteran of the National Simulation Center, BCTP; I live in your town; and I work on your fort.

The -- (audio difficulty) -- I apologize for the quality of my voice, I'm down at Benning doing AAEF (sp) stuff. My question is the integration of information operations into BCTP, and even brigade level training, given its growing importance.

I wonder if you have any thoughts on what I -- (audio difficulty) -- thus far -- and have actually been involved in preparing is, it is still a sidebar, which may be appropriate but I'd like to hear your thoughts on that subject, sir.

COL. ABRAMS: Yeah. Well, I wouldn't -- I wouldn't call it a sidebar, but I will tell you that there's still great, great room for improvement.

Again, I go back to my own personal experience. I was on the first full-spectrum rotation in 2003, and Information Operations was exactly what you just described. It was a mild annoyance that basically, you know, I could kind of push off to my staff and so I could focus my attention on other things.

I can tell you today, at both the -- and the dirt CTCs and the Battle Command Training Program, we have got a great deal of emphasis on just that, because we understand clearly -- and we've learned this lesson the hard way in this current fight, that tactical actions oftentimes transfer into strategic consequences, especially in terms of the way it's presented in the media.

And so we've got to have savvy leaders at every level, not just brigade but battalion and company-level that understand the consequences of their actions or inactions in these full-spectrum operations.

So, absolutely, in terms -- you wouldn't even recognize the scenario development that the Lizard Team's got to go through to -- go through at the National Training Center these days. It's incredible the number of threads that they have to develop so that we can get to those training objectives at the dirt CTCs.

Now having said that, do we have room for improvement? Absolutely. Couple of -- couple of things that we've done for that: 1) At the BCT level now we have -- we're authorized a information operations officer. And, in fact, we started a pilot course -- I want to say 18 months ago here at Fort Leavenworth, and they're now in full production I think -- but those functional, Area 30 officers that were original, the original design. When we went to a modular organization, we didn't have them in the brigade. Really about two- and-a-half years ago we came to the realization that, holy smokes, this is a BCT fight, and below. We've got to get this expertise lower. So we got IO officers now

getting pumped out and developed -- trained and educated, and back out to the force.

The second piece of this is we've got to get the right guys, functional Area 30s, with combat experience who have done it -- walked the walk, down-range at the CTCs to be quality OCs. And you will -- you know better than anybody that if an OC doesn't have credibility with the Player unit, he's -- he's not going to have much chance at being an effective trainer.

So we're working real hard to get those guys out there. And I want to say JRTC is full up, NTC we still have some room to go. We've got one JRMC in Hohenfels, and we don't have one yet in BCTP, but we get a loaner from the IO department. As you know, Fort Leavenworth is the IO proponent for the Army.

So I'd say that, you know, we're making great strides and we're spending a lot of energy on it. It is a main effort for the CAD (sp) commander. He's personally leading the charge, but we got a ways to go.

Q Thank you, sir.

COL. ABRAMS: You bet.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. I know you're -- we're about out of time here, do you have any closing comments for us?

COL. ABRAMS: Yeah, I'll just tell you kind of how I started. You know there are a lot of people who are interested in, you know, what we're doing in terms of training the force, and getting ready for the current fight, and for the next fight.

And I guess my final message is, is that there are a lot of people that are expending a great deal of intellectual energy to make sure that we have adjusted our training capability to reflect the current environment, and what we're going to see in the future. And I would invite you -- and I hope you take me up on it, get you an opportunity to get out to a Combat Training Center so you can see just how far we've come in terms of transforming the way we train our formations.

And thanks for what you do. I've seen your sites, they're pretty good.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much for joining us today for the Bloggers Roundtable. Hopefully, we can speak again here after a few months to kind of see how things are going.

COL. ABRAMS: Okay.

MR. HOLT: We do appreciate it.

COL. ABRAMS: Okay. You bet. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

Q Colonel, thank you for the time.

COL. ABRAMS: You bet.

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